

## I. Introduction

This compendium contains case studies of useful practices. Useful practices are those processes, techniques, or innovative uses of resources that have either demonstrated actual improvements or have the potential to improve the cost, schedule, quality, performance, or some other factor that impacts National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) implementation. It is intended to be a living document that will be periodically updated to reflect the needs of NEPA practitioners as well as the current state of NEPA law and policy. CEQ will periodically convene meetings of NEPA Task Force members and initiate data calls for useful practices that will be reviewed and added to the compendium.

### The NEPA Task Force

In 1997, the Council on Environmental Quality published a report entitled, “*The National Environmental Policy Act – A Study of its Effectiveness after Twenty-five Years.*” This report examined NEPA’s effectiveness and prospects for improving the environmental analysis and documentation process outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act and the CEQ Regulations Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 C.F.R. parts 1500-1508). The 1997 Report highlighted twelve cases as examples to demonstrate where agencies were exploring new frontiers for improving on the NEPA process. These case studies served to alert agencies to successful practices that may have application in other situations and are available at <http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/nepa25fn.pdf>.

In 2002, CEQ established the National Environmental Policy Act Task Force in an ongoing effort to improve and modernize NEPA analyses and documentation and to foster improved coordination among all levels of government and the public. The NEPA Task Force reviewed current Federal agencies’ planning and decision-making processes to determine ways that agencies can obtain higher levels of efficiency, clarity, and ease of management through the improved use of existing authorities; better information management; improved interagency and intergovernmental collaboration; and the use of new technologies. Charged with proposing specific actions to make the NEPA process more effective, efficient, and timely, the Task Force focused on several areas of NEPA implementation and prepared its report, *NEPA Task Force Report to the Council on Environmental Quality: Modernizing NEPA Implementation (Modernizing NEPA Implementation)* that made recommendations to CEQ on actions CEQ should take to improve NEPA implementation. The report is available at <http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/ntf/report/index.html>.

In addition to the report, the Task Force was asked to develop a compendium of case studies or examples of agency efforts to improve the NEPA process. The examples and case studies in this compendium are not formally endorsed nor are they guaranteed to ensure success or improvement – what works for one agency or

one project may not work for all. These examples and case studies were compiled to share examples and ideas for modernizing NEPA practices – making the process more effective, efficient and timely.

This compendium does not establish new requirements for NEPA analyses and is not, and should not be viewed as, formal CEQ guidance.

## **Selecting Useful Practices**

A suit of “case studies” was collected through the process of personal interviews with Federal agencies, conference calls with NEPA field practitioners, and submissions from the public. The term “best practice” was originally used to characterize practices that the task force could use for broad dissemination that demonstrate efficient and effective practices useful in modernizing NEPA analysis and documentation.

After reviewing the case studies and discussing them with agencies and other participants in NEPA processes, the task force decided that the term “best practices” is misleading because it implies a level of use beyond that currently realized, as well as some type of peer review or expert’s endorsement. The term “useful practices” is used because it more accurately describes the case studies. A useful practice is essentially a process, technique, or innovative use of resources that has either improved or demonstrated the potential to improve the way an agency conducts its NEPA process by realizing cost savings, producing more timely analyses and documents, improving the quality of analysis, effectively engaging interested parties, or otherwise made the NEPA process more effective, efficient or timely.